

**PAUL ON WOMEN IN THE CHURCH:  
The Contradictions of Coiffure in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16**

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There has been a great deal of debate surrounding this passage, and the history of its interpretation is quite varied.<sup>1</sup> This is a result, in part, of an inherent contradiction in this pericope between vv. 4-7 (which shall be called part A) and vv. 10-12 (which shall be called part B). As we shall discover, part A requires women to bow to Greek cultural norms with respect to coiffure, and at least implies an inferior position for women in the church; part B allows women to wear whatever kind of headdress they desire, regardless of cultural dictates, and states that men and women are equal in the church. This essay will: (1) describe the nature of this contradiction, (2) describe the various interpretations it has been given by exegetes, and (3) give a new interpretation of this passage on the basis of a hitherto untried understanding of this contradiction.

*1. The Nature of the Contradiction*

4. Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonors his head.
5. But every woman who prays or prophesies with unbound hair dishonors her head; for she is the same as a woman with a shaved head.
6. For if a woman does not keep her hair bound up, let it be cut short. But if it is a disgrace for a woman to have short hair, or a shaved head, let her keep it bound up.
7. For a man ought not to bind up his hair, being the image and glory of God. But the woman is the glory of man.

The first difficult phrase we encounter in part A is *kata kephalēs echōn* (v. 4), usually rendered, 'with a veil' or 'with the head covered'. There are three reasons for rejecting this translation.<sup>2</sup> First, *kata* does not generally mean 'on' (as it would have to for 'head covering'). Usually it means 'down', or accompanied by a verb of motion 'against'.<sup>3</sup> Second, the word veil, *kalymma*, does not occur at any point in this passage. Third, v. 14 specifically mentions the idea of men having long hair (*koma*). We thus join a growing number of scholars in rendering *kata kephalēs echōn* as 'having (long hair) coming down from the head'.<sup>4</sup>

The next lexical difficulty is the meaning of *akatakalyptos*, typically rendered 'unveiled' or 'uncovered'. The word is fairly unusual, but is used in the LXX, at Leviticus 13.45, where it renders the Hebrew phrase פרוע את ראש יהיה פרוע. The same Hebrew phrase פרוע את ראש האשה is used specifically of a woman's head at Numbers 5.18 where it means, 'loosen the hair' or 'unbraid the hair'.<sup>5</sup> Philo uses the Greek phrase found at 1 Corinthians 11.5 in his discussion of Numbers 5.18.<sup>6</sup> He describes this state as one where the woman's *epikranon*, or headdress, has been removed by the priest.<sup>7</sup> Greek women wore ornamental bands or combs; their long hair was often plaited and wrapped around their head, and the comb or band would hold the hair in place. Several busts and frescoes illustrate this coiffure.<sup>8</sup> The meaning of *akatakalyptos*, as Philo and the LXX use it, is 'with unbound or loosened hair': a woman's long hair flowing loosely down from her head, and not wrapped up and held in place in the typical Greek fashion. This Greek coiffure is aptly described by the word *peribolaion* in v. 15.<sup>9</sup>

Knowing now the meaning of these unusual words, we can proceed to discuss part A as a whole. These verses are, first of all, more descriptive than prescriptive. The 'if . . . then' statements in vv. 4, 5 describe a certain state of affairs. They do not say that people *must not* wear their hair in a certain way, but only that if they do then they shame their heads.<sup>10</sup>

Having unbound hair is just as shameful as having it shaved off (v. 5, *xyraomai*). The idea expressed here is that a woman's long beautiful hair was something she took pride in (v. 15 where *koma* is her *doxa*) and to have it shaved off or cut short would be unfortunate, would be a shame, or would be ugly (*aischros*; see Gen. 41.3 LXX). It is also possible that to have short hair or to have one's hair shaved off was some form of social disgrace in Corinth during this period.<sup>11</sup>

The idea, for whatever reason, is clear: it is a shame for women in church not to wear their hair bound up and beautified in the Greek manner. It does not say that it must or should be a shame, but simply that it is.

Greek men during this period wore their hair short.<sup>12</sup> We are simply told that long, bound-up hair (vv. 4, 7) is a shame for men. It is hard to know exactly what motivated this belief. Some have suggested that the long bound-up hair on a man, in this period, was indicative of homosexuality.<sup>13</sup> It is nevertheless difficult to understand what this has to do with being the image and glory of God (v. 7). Perhaps one might conjecture that God was understood as a masculine deity, that men alone were his image and glory, and that for this reason they should not affect feminine ways.

Women are seen as inferior to men in these verses. Men are obligated to wear their hair short, but this is because of their superior status as the image of God (v. 7b). Women, on the other hand, who do not keep their hair properly ought to have it cut off (vv. 5, 6). This sort of extremism indicates a low view of women. Men no doubt wished the women in church to adorn and beautify their hair in the proper Greek manner, for their own visual pleasure. This understanding of the inferior status of women is perfectly in accord with the Greek point of view.<sup>14</sup>

10. For this reason the woman ought to have power over her head, because of the messengers.
11. In any case, woman is not different from man, nor is man different from woman, in the Lord.
12. For just as woman is from man, so man is born of woman.

The phrases 'for this reason' and 'because of the messengers' (v. 10) in part B I should like to discuss when we take up the passage as a whole. For our purpose of describing the differences between part A and part B, the phrase 'the woman ought to have power over her head' (*exousian echein epi tēs kephalēs*) is most important.

Throughout the NT, *exousia* means power, right, or freedom of choice: the ability to do something.<sup>15</sup> When used as the object of *echō*, these words mean: possessing the ability or right to perform some act. For example: at John 10.18 *exousian echō* means that Jesus possesses the power or right to take up or to lay down his life; at Acts 9.14, *exei exousian* means that Saul possesses the authority or right to jail the Christians. When this phrase is followed by the preposition

*epi* it means: possessing the authority or ability to do something with, or act in some way, upon the object of the preposition.<sup>16</sup> To take two more examples: in Revelation 16.9 *echontos tēn exousian epi tas plēgas* describes God as the one who has power over the plagues, i.e., who has the ability and authority to send the plagues or not; and in Revelation 20.6 the second death has no authority (*ouk echei exousian*) over those who have participated in the first resurrection (*epi toutōn*), i.e., the second death has no power or right to do anything to them.

From this discussion, it can be concluded that the phrase in v. 10 means: women ought to have the freedom, right or power to do what they wish with their heads. In the context of this passage, it would mean that women ought to have the right to choose whatever hairstyle they wish.<sup>17</sup> I must humbly conclude, *pace* the vast majority of scholars, that there is no reason to interpret *exousian* as a sign or symbol of authority: not in the syntax and semantics of the Greek, nor the egalitarian context of vv. 11, 12 (below). Rather, v. 10 is in direct opposition to part A, where women shame their heads if they do not wear the hairstyle dictated by culture. In contradiction to this custom, v. 10 states that women ought to have the freedom to determine how they shall wear their hair in church.

The next verses, 11 and 12, are also egalitarian in nature.<sup>18</sup> The word *chōris* is best understood in this context as 'different from', which Kürzinger demonstrated in his article on this verse.<sup>19</sup> The meaning here is that men and women are equal in the Lord, and therefore when they meet as his Body, women do not have an inferior status.

The word *plēn* does not mean that v. 11 is in contrast with v. 10.<sup>20</sup> Rather, '*plēn* means more nearly "only, in any case" in Paul, used to conclude a discussion and emphasize what is essential'.<sup>21</sup> The essential point Paul wants to make, therefore, is that men and women are equal in the Lord (Gal. 3.28). Again, we see in these verses a direct contrast with part A, and also with Greek, Roman, and Jewish culture.<sup>22</sup>

In summary, here are the contrasts between parts A and B. Part A describes a cultural situation in which women (and men) wear their hair according to the Greek cultural norms, or else they shame their heads. Part B tells us that women ought to have the right to wear their hair however they wish. Part A is descriptive, telling us the way things are for women. Part B is prescriptive, telling us the way things

should be for women. Part A at least implies the inferiority of women. Part B asserts that men and women are equal in Christ. Finally, Part A is in accord with the Greek culture of the age in which it is written, whereas part B is in defiance of the same culture.

## 2. Interpretations of the Contradiction

We shall now examine the way interpreters have dealt with this contradiction. Generally, they have chosen among three approaches: (1) Paul in part B is balancing out his more extreme statements in part A; (2) a later redactor, or redactors, inserted this entire passage into the text of 1 Corinthians; or (3) Paul insists on Greek hairstyles in order not to offend the Greeks.

### 1. Paul Corrects Himself

The general understanding of this perspective is that Paul has laid down some fairly harsh commandments for women, and in vv. 11, 12 wishes to balance this out by indicating the ultimate equality of women and men in the Lord.<sup>23</sup> Usually such interpreters ascribe to Paul some culture-bound reason for insisting that women wear veils or have long hair, such as a fear of homosexuality, or Paul's Jewish background.<sup>24</sup> Another popular option is this: Paul commands women to veil for some theological reason, such as the need for people in worship to reflect on proper order of creation (viz., woman subordinate to man), or the need to cover man's glory during worship.<sup>25</sup>

There are several problems with this perspective. First, the interpretation misjudges the force of the contradiction between parts A and B. As we have noticed, part B does not balance out part A on a few points, but rather is in complete antithesis to part A at every point. Second, this interpretation misunderstands the phrase, 'a woman ought to have power over her head', at v. 10. As we have seen, this phrase does not mean that a woman should have a symbol of authority on her head, but rather that a woman possesses the right to wear her hair however she wishes. If one insists (in opposition to this paper) on rendering *katakalyptos* as 'being veiled', then v. 10 would mean that a woman has the right to wear or not to wear a veil, as she chooses. Again, this would be a contradiction, not a balancing, of vv. 5, 6. Third, it is difficult to believe that Paul would insist upon Gentile women veiling in worship, as Jewish women did.<sup>26</sup> He

consistently stood for the freedom of Gentiles from Jewish customs, such as circumcision. Paul, in the preceding chapters, gives Gentiles very liberal allowance with respect to eating meat sacrificed to idols. As G.W. Trompf has said:

The onus of proof is now on those who wish to argue that St. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, who has just given careful but (by Jewish standards) conspicuously liberal conditions for dining with pagans, now wants to impose a very culture-bound regulation.<sup>27</sup>

If we understand this passage to be about hair as suggested above, it is still hard to see why Paul would require men and women to adopt Greek hairstyles in church. If Paul was afraid that men with long hair might be taken for homosexuals, as many who follow this interpretation assert, why did he himself wear long hair during his stay at Corinth? Jewish men let their hair grow long while they were under a vow (Num. 6.5), even in Paul's day.<sup>28</sup> Acts 18.18 tells us that Paul was under a vow during his stay at Corinth, and had his hair cut only after leaving the city.<sup>29</sup> Why would Paul require the Jewish Christians at Corinth to obey a Greek custom he himself felt free to ignore while staying in that city?

For these three reasons, then, the interpretation that Paul is simply balancing out part A with part B is difficult to accept.

## *2. Editorial Insertion*

If the traditional interpretation is rejected, for the reasons given above, perhaps a more recent suggestion can be accepted. William O. Walker has argued that 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 is an editorial interpolation.<sup>30</sup> This idea, slightly modified, has also been well presented in an article by G.W. Trompf.<sup>31</sup> This thesis recognizes the contradictory nature of our passage, and to this extent is superior to the traditional interpretation. Another point in its favor is that this interpretation explains the contradiction between the culture-bound vv. 4-6 and the freedom that Paul generally gives believers and indeed, that he himself exercised. As Lamar Cope noted:

The greatest strength of Walker's original article lay in his showing that the context of the interpolation is out of harmony with the material found in the rest of the genuine letters.<sup>32</sup>

As tempting as the argument for editorial insertion may be, there are problems that throw some doubt upon it. First, the scholarly consensus is that 1 Corinthians was authored by Paul himself. With

the exception of the two passages about women in church (11.2-16 and 14.34-36), there is no evidence of editorial tampering in this letter.<sup>33</sup> No convincing reason has been given for an editor to insert these particular passages, and then leave the rest of the epistle intact. Moreover, if an editor inserted 1.2-16 and 14.34-36, why would he (or she?) separate these passages? Would it not be more normal to insert them together, especially since the rest of the letter is left alone? Of course, they could be the work of different editors at different times, but this is unlikely, given their common theme and common particularity as the only editorial tampering.

Second, the textual evidence for our passage is excellent. It is both early and geographically diverse.<sup>34</sup> Any editorial insertion would have to be very early, and done at Corinth itself, in order to affect every textual tradition. Again, if a Corinthian tampered with this letter, why not tone down other parts as well?

Third, the argument for the editorial insertion of part A is stronger than it is for part B. As we have shown above, Paul presents in part B a cohesive argument for the right of women to wear their hair however they wish in church. There is no conflict between these verses and Paul's teaching in the rest of his genuine letters. Thus the argument for editorial insertion is much weaker for part B.

Fourth, the assumption of editorial tampering in a genuine Pauline letter should be considered only after every other possibility has been examined. It is an argument of last resort, only plausible when it becomes impossible to make sense of these verses in any other way.

For these four reasons, tempting as Walker's thesis is, and even though it is superior to the traditional interpretation, on careful analysis it is hard to accept the idea that 11.2-16 is an editorial interpolation.

### 3. *Cultural Accommodation*

The most likely interpretation yet given of the contradiction between parts A and B has been that of Annie Jaubert.<sup>35</sup> She has been followed in English by Colin Brown.<sup>36</sup> The gravamen of this interpretation is that 11.2-16 is an example of Paul's principle of not giving offense. In the context of our understanding of part A, this would mean that Paul commanded Greek hairstyles in church, in order not to give offense to the Greeks. This idea gains plausibility when one notes that, immediately preceding our passage, Paul has argued that the Corinthians should not eat meat sacrificed to idols,

for exactly the same reason. Indeed, Paul explicitly states his principle of 'not causing anyone to stumble' so that 'they may be saved'—just before he begins our passage (10.31-33).

Even though this is the most likely interpretation given to date of part A, it fails to encompass the contradiction between part A and part B. For if Paul does command Greek hairstyles at worship, why would he say in v. 10 that women ought to have freedom over their heads? Second, if Paul does base his words in part A on the principle of not giving offense, why does he not say so? He does on every other occasion (1 Cor. 8 and 10; Tit. 2). Third, quite to the contrary, part A's description of the state of affairs for women is based on shamefulness, or perhaps ugliness, not on cultural offense (vv. 4, 5). Further, the command for men to wear short hair is based on theological, not cultural, reasons (v. 7). Fourth, Paul quite reasonably and dispassionately argues that the Corinthians should not eat meat sacrificed to idols. Yet v. 6 seems quite harsh and fanatical in comparison, with its demands that women who do not beautifully adorn their hair should have it cropped. For these reasons, then, even the most likely interpretation given to date cannot be accepted.

### 3. *Toward a New Interpretation*

If we leave behind the three interpretations considered above, how shall we understand the contradiction between part A and part B? One hermeneutical hypothesis yet to be considered is that this contradiction results from the nature of the letter itself. 1 Corinthians is a polemical epistle. Throughout this letter, Paul corrects the Corinthian praxis, opposing it with his own apostolic understanding of what it means to be 'in Christ'.<sup>37</sup> In many cases, Paul describes the belief or practice which he objects to, before proceeding to correct it. I should therefore like to propose the hypothesis that what we have called part A is Paul's description of Corinthian custom and that part B is Paul's correction of this custom on the basis of his understanding of what it means to be 'in Christ' (v. 11). I shall demonstrate the plausibility of what might *prima facie* seem an unlikely hypothesis, by a re-examination of the passage as a whole.

Most scholars see 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 as Paul's response to some problem in the Corinthian church, probably communicated to him by the letter they wrote (7.1).<sup>38</sup> It may help our understanding of the pericope if we postulate a *Sitz im Leben* that can explain its present form. A possible one for 11.2-16 is as follows.

Paul, Priscilla, and possibly others with them during their stay in Corinth (Acts 18.1, 18), do not wear their hair in the proper Greek manner. The Jews at the Corinthian church, now thoroughly Hellenized, wear their hair in the Greek style in church, and the fact that Paul and his friends do not upsets them. However, they do not approach the apostle to the Gentiles in person, but complain to him later in a letter.

Alternatively, one might understand that the great plethora of social groups united by the church (rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female) has resulted in the fact that not all people dress the same, or wear the same kind of hairstyle. This *Sitz im Leben* seems possible also, since in this same chapter Paul complains that the Corinthians are factionalized when they eat the Lord's Supper, some being able to afford much wine, while the poor go hungry (11.18-21). Perhaps then the upper class faction was complaining that the poor, the slaves, and the Jews did not properly adorn their hair during the worship service, and brought shame to the church.

For whatever reason, the Corinthians complained to Paul that some men and women were not wearing their hair in a dignified Greek manner in church. They explained to him at length basically what we read in vv. 3-7b, namely, that a man or woman shames his or her head (or is ugly) when he or she stands before a large group of people with an improper hairstyle. After all, Paul himself had taught them that God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman (v. 3). The Corinthians argued that if a woman does not wish to wear her hair properly bound up, let her cut it off. But since it is a shame to cut off a woman's long beautiful hair, long hair being a woman's glory (v. 15), she should properly adorn and beautify it when she comes to church (v. 6). After all, a man is the image and glory of God, and should not wear long feminine hair (v. 7); but since man is the head of woman, a woman should be willing to beautify her long hair for him.

The above is a hypothetical *Sitz im Leben*, which nevertheless is a good possibility if my hypothesis for this passage is correct. I have described it because it is helpful to know the situation and the argument to which Paul is responding, even if that description is somewhat conjectural. Let us now proceed to an analysis of the passage itself, which will be the true test of my hypothesis.

First of all, it will be necessary to decide just where the shift

between part A and part B occurs. Paul's argument against the Corinthians does not begin at v. 10, because the phrase, 'for this reason' (*dia touto*) in v. 10, indicates that v. 10 is the conclusion of a previous argument.<sup>39</sup> The argument in vv. 8-10 continues the statement made in v. 7c, that woman is the glory of man, as shown below. Therefore the *men/de* arrangement of v. 7 presents itself as a likely candidate for the shift between Paul's description of the Corinthian praxis and his argument against it.

This use of the *men/de* form, stating two sides of an argument, is not unknown in the NT.<sup>40</sup> For example, the *men/de* form in Romans 7.25 sums up the entire argument in that chapter by saying, 'on the one hand I am serving the law of God with my mind, but on the other hand, with my flesh, the law of sin'. In the same fashion v. 7 states the two opposing perspectives of the Corinthians, and of Paul. On the one hand, the Corinthians believed that men were superior to women, and that men alone were in the image of God 'and the glory of God. Therefore, women should beautify their hair for men, and men should not wear long, bound-up, feminine hair. On the other hand, Paul argues, woman is the glory of man. Therefore (*dia touto*, v. 10) a woman ought to have the freedom to choose her own hairstyle, and in any case (v. 11) men and women are equal in Christ. As we can see, v. 7 does sum up the two opposing points of view, and is the logical transition point between the perspective of parts A and B. We can now proceed to a verse by verse examination of our passage, to discover the way that this passage fits together as a whole.

Paul begins in v. 2 by commending the Corinthians for holding on to the traditions (*paradosis*) which he taught them. The word *paradosis* indicates that these teachings were not new with Paul, but were handed down to him from the earliest Christian leaders.<sup>41</sup> The words *thelō hymas eidenai* which begin v. 3 are the positive form of the more typical Pauline double negative, 'I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren' (1 Cor. 10.1; 12.1).<sup>42</sup> This phrase does not indicate that Paul is teaching something new, but that he wishes to bring out a new aspect of what was already known. No doubt the Corinthians already knew about the exodus (10.1) and about spiritual gifts (12.1), but Paul wishes to teach them something new about these subjects. The positive phrase is rare, and found only here and in Colossians 2.1. There Paul wants to inform the Colossians and Laodiceans of his great labors for them, which they no doubt already knew of; but Paul reminds them, so that they might be encouraged

(Col. 2.2). Similarly in 1 Corinthians 11.2-16, Paul wishes to bring out a new aspect of the teaching about headship, which the Corinthians had not previously considered.

The three-part formula of headship in v. 3 represents a Corinthian rephrasing of Paul's *paradosis* (v. 2). Paul no doubt affirmed these things in one sense, but he would not phrase them in this way. Paul's typical phrase is not 'Christ is the head of every man', but 'Christ is the head of the church' (Col. 1.18; Eph. 1.22). And Paul nowhere else uses the phrase, 'God is the head of Christ' (cf. 1 Cor. 15.28).

The exact meaning of *kephalē* in the NT is ambiguous, as it is here. It is quite normal in Greek literature for 'head' to mean 'origin', 'source of being'.<sup>43</sup> It is this sense in which Paul can affirm the Corinthian formula: Christ is the head of man, man is the head of woman, and God is the head of Christ. Paul does teach that woman came from man (vv. 8, 9). He would say that Christ is the creator of all things (1 Cor. 8.6), and therefore he is the origin of man as well. While for Paul Christ is equal with God, it is also true that he comes from God (Rom. 9.5; Phil. 2.6). Another rarer meaning for *kephalē* is 'authority, dominion', which it receives from association in the LXX with the Hebrew word שׂר. This is no doubt the sense in which the Corinthians understood the word. Thus the debate between Paul and the Corinthians can be seen as a debate over the meaning of 'head'. The new aspect of this which Paul wishes to teach the Corinthians is that the headship of man over woman does not mean that men have a superior status. Yet Paul affirms the Corinthian three-part formula with the phrase 'I want you to know', even as he corrects and reinterprets it. For, to cite F.F. Bruce about Paul's style in this epistle:

He goes along with each party as far as he can, agreeing with its contention but adding something which neutralizes its excesses.<sup>44</sup>

An interesting parallel to the style of argument in our passage can be found in 1 Corinthians 8. The introductory phrase, 'I want you to know', at 11.3 is similar to the phrase 'we know' at 8.1, 4. Both use the verb *oida*. Both affirm the statement that follows, which Paul then re-interprets in the body of the text. At 8.1-4, Paul wishes to affirm the Corinthian beliefs that 'we all have knowledge' (v. 1) and that 'no idol exists in the world and no god exists in the world but one' (v. 4). These theological truths were used by the Corinthians to justify their libertarian eating habits (i.e., eating meat sacrificed to idols). As Conzelmann notes:

In 8:1, too, it is plain that he [Paul] is directly taking up a Corinthian slogan and recognizing it in principle, by using the word *oidamen*, 'we are aware', to include himself and his readers.<sup>45</sup>

While Paul affirms these Corinthian slogans in ch. 8, he neutralizes their excesses by telling them to 'take care, lest this liberty (*exousia*) of yours somehow becomes a stumbling block to the weak' (v. 9). Thus in both chs. 8 and 11, Paul affirms a Corinthian slogan using the word *oida* in an introductory formula (8.14; 11.3), but then goes on to correct the excesses derived from the slogan's misinterpretation. Of course, 'we know that' is different from 'now I want you to know that', but as we have noted before, Paul's use of this declarative formula in 11.3 does not mean that he is teaching something new, but rather bringing out a new aspect of something already known. It is clear, therefore, that Paul is introducing a Corinthian slogan with these words.

Having begun to cite the Corinthians' beliefs, Paul continues to do so in vv. 4-7b. There is no grammatical break beginning v. 4, since Paul is simply continuing to describe the Corinthians' beliefs and customs, which began with the three-part formula of v. 3. These words *pas anēr* (and *pas gynē*) mean every man and woman among Paul's readers, i.e., every Corinthian man or woman. As we noticed before, Paul does not lay down here a rule of practice, or a command, but describes a cultural situation in which men who wear long hair shame their heads. We have described this cultural situation above, in our discussion of part A.

The low view Corinthians held of women is exemplified in these verses. No suggestion is made that men with long hair should get a haircut, but appeal is simply made to their superior status (vv. 3, 7b). Men should preserve the distinction between the sexes (and thus preserve their superior status), by avoiding feminine ways such as long, bound-up hair (v. 7a). On the other hand, women who do not wish to conform to the cultural standards of adorning and beautifying their hair should let it be cut off (v. 6). We can understand this sort of viewpoint coming from a chauvinist culture like the Corinthian one of this period. Of course, it makes little sense coming from Paul.

As described above, v. 7c begins Paul's refutation of the Corinthian perspective on women. He starts by telling them that woman is the *doxa* of man. This does not mean that woman is simply the image of man.<sup>46</sup> Rather, the word *doxa* means that woman is the glory, the splendor, the grandeur of man.<sup>47</sup> In this way, Paul re-interprets for

the Corinthians their phrase that 'man is the head of woman'. He continues to affirm that woman finds her origin, her 'head' in man, in vv. 8, 9.

These verses undoubtedly refer to Genesis 2. This ancient Hebrew narrative used to be understood as teaching the inferior status of woman. Modern scholars, however, are beginning to see that it really points to the equality of men and women (as does Gen. 1.27).<sup>48</sup> God pronounces his creation 'very good' (Gen. 1.31). This includes man created male and female (Gen. 1.27). But the male alone is 'not good', so God creates a 'helper' suitable to him (Gen. 2.15). This word עוזר does not mean that the female is an assistant to the male, in an inferior position. On the contrary, this word is only used of help from a superior, in the OT.<sup>49</sup> This means that, for Genesis 1 and 2, woman is the equal of man. The creation of woman out of man (v. 8) rectifies the man's situation as 'not good'. Man was not made because woman needed his help, but woman was made because man needed her help (v. 9). This points to the *doxa* of woman, as the succor of man, and to her at least equal standing with man.<sup>50</sup>

Paul, on the basis of Genesis 2, sets up a hierarchy of glory in contrast to the Corinthian hierarchy of authority. Man, created last, is the acme of creation, the image and glory of God (Ps. 8). The female is the last part of man to be created, and thus the glory of man. The hierarchy of glory is this: woman is the glory of man, man is the glory of God. These verses, 7c-9, do not debase woman, but rather point to her status as the succor and glory of man.

Paul concludes in v. 10 that because (*dia touto*) woman is the glory of man, she ought to have the right to determine her own hairstyle. Paul sums up his argument thus far by affirming the equality of men and women 'in Christ' (v. 11)—a common appeal for Paul when correcting the Corinthians in this letter. We have described these verses above, in the discussion of part B.

What we have not examined is the second reason Paul gives for the right women ought to have: *dia tous angelous* (v. 10). A great deal of thought has been expended upon these three words.<sup>51</sup> There has yet to be put forth a convincing reason why it is 'because of the angels' that women should have the freedom to choose their own hairstyles. However, it might be possible that by *angelous* Paul means human messengers.<sup>52</sup> To fit the context, these would be female messengers, which Paul was known to use. For example, Paul used the deacon Phoebe (Rom. 16.1) to deliver the letter to the Romans. Priscilla, an

important co-worker with Paul, was with him in Corinth. Perhaps it was female church leaders like these whom Paul had in mind. Why would a woman leader whom Paul might send, or whom anyone might send to Corinth with an important message, be forced to wear her hair in accordance with the dictates of the Corinthian church? While we cannot be certain that this is what Paul means by *dia tous angelous*, this interpretation is put forward as at least as plausible as others.

After concluding his argument by the egalitarian statements of vv. 10-12, Paul reinforces it with an appeal to common sense (v. 13), to the natural order (vv. 14, 15), and to tradition (v. 16).

13. Judge for yourselves. It is proper for a woman to pray to God with unbound hair.
14. Nature does not teach you that long hair is a disgrace to a man,
15. But if a woman has long hair it is her glory. For long, loose hair is given to her instead of wrapped-up hair.
16. And if anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

These verses, 13-15, are universally understood to be rhetorical questions. But in the context of the argument Paul makes in vv. 7c-12 for the right of women to choose their hairstyle, we can see that they are actually statements. Paul appeals to the common sense of the Corinthians in v. 13. Surely it doesn't make any difference to God what kind of hair a woman has when she prays, Paul is saying. The negative used in v. 14, *oude*, is never used in a rhetorical question by Paul.<sup>53</sup> In any case, we have already seen that Paul wore his hair long while on a vow, apparently without shame. Again, v. 14 is not a question but a statement which makes perfect common sense. Naturally, if men do not cut their hair, it will grow long. Nature, therefore, did not teach the Corinthians that long hair is a disgrace on a man. And nature did not teach the Corinthians, Paul continues, that long hair is a woman's glory. The Corinthians felt that a woman should adorn and beautify her hair, as we have seen. For them, her long, beautiful hair was her glory, which of course she should properly braid and wrap around her head. Paul insists in opposition to this that long, loose hair (*koma*) is given to women *anti peribolaion*. The meaning of *anti* here is not 'for use as', *pace* most commentators or translators.<sup>54</sup> Such a meaning does not occur in the NT.<sup>55</sup>

Rather, the word means 'in place of', 'instead of' in this context.<sup>56</sup> In a natural state, he argues, women have long, loose hair, instead of plaits wrapped about their head in the Greek fashion. Verses 13-15 make sense in the context of Paul's argument when they are seen as statements, not as questions. As statements, they back up Paul's previous argument by appealing to common sense, and to the natural order.

Paul concludes his argument against the Corinthians with an appeal to tradition (v. 16). Paul himself does not practice the Corinthian custom of wearing short hair, and neither do the other churches insist that women wear bound hair and men wear short hair. Therefore (Paul leaves unsaid), neither should the Corinthian church. For Paul, this ends the discussion.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this paper we have brought out the clear contradiction in 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 between vv. 4-7 (part A) and vv. 10-12 (part B). Finding other interpretations in some ways inadequate, I have put forward my own hypothesis: vv. 3-7b are Paul's description of Corinthian beliefs and practice, while in vv. 7c-16 Paul opposes these customs and beliefs, and asserts the right of woman to choose her own hairstyle, and in the process explains the glory of woman, and her equality with man in the Lord.

We will conclude with a summary of the reasons for accepting this novel hypothesis. First, it adequately explains the contradictions between parts A and B. Second, it understands the phrase in v. 10, *exousian echein epi*, in a manner that is consistent with the meaning of these words throughout the NT. Third, it avoids the idea that Paul, contrary to his teaching and practice in other places, imposes a culture-bound regulation upon the church, and attaches such importance to a rather unimportant matter (i.e., hairstyles). Fourth, it explains the chauvinism and extremism of vv. 5-7b, as originating ultimately with the Corinthians. Fifth, it means that Paul consistently and clearly taught and practiced the equality of men and women in the church (Gal. 3.28). Sixth, it explains this passage in the context of 1 Corinthians, as another example of Paul's correction of Corinthian praxis by a clear exposition of what it means to be 'in Christ'. While the hypothesis I have put forth is a radical departure from the way this passage has been understood in the past, I believe that for these

reasons, it deserves careful consideration. If I am right, it means that (contrary to popular opinion) Paul argued, in opposition to the culture of his day, for the dignity, rights, and equality of women in the church.

## NOTES

1. See Linda Mercadante, *From Hierarchy to Equality: A Comparison of Past and Present Interpretations of 1 Cor. 11:2-16* (Vancouver: Regent College, G-M-H Books, 1978); and also, Ralph N. Schutt, 'A History of the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16' (MA Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978).

2. For this interpretation, I am in debt to Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, 'Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16', *CBQ* 42 (1980), 483f.

3. BAG, 406.

4. Murphy-O'Connor, *loc. cit.*; James B. Hurley, 'Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women?', *WJT* 35 (1972-73), 190-220; Abel Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple* (Lund: Gleerup, 1965), 161-66; W.J. Martin, '1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation', in W.W. Gasque and R.P. Martin (eds.), *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 233.

5. See R. Laird Harris, *et al.* (eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), II, 736f.; C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), III, 31; BDB, 828f.

6. Philo, *Spec. Leg.*, 3.60 (LCL, VII, 512).

7. *Spec. Leg.*, 3.56 (LCL, VII, 510).

8. See Murphy-O'Connor, 'Sex and Logic', 484-90; and for illustrations, see *Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities* (New York: Harper Bros., 1897), 389; and W. Smith, *et al.*, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London: J. Murray, 1901), I, 499.

9. For the interpretation of these two words, I am in debt to Murphy-O'Connor, 'Sex and Logic', 487-89.

10. See Samuel T. Lowrie, '1 Corinthians XI and the Ordination of Women as Ruling Elders', *Princeton Theol. Rev.* 19 (1921), 116, 120.

11. See Murphy-O'Connor, 'Sex and Logic', 490; Marco Adinolfi, 'Il velo della donna e la rilettura Paolina di 1 Cor. 11,2-16', *Revist. Bib. Ital.* 23 (1975), 150; 'Hair', in J.L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Milwaukee: Bruce Pub., 1965), 333; and Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 186; but the literature cited may not apply to Corinth in the first century AD.

12. See Adinolfi, 'Il velo', 165; and arts. in n. 8, above.

13. Murphy-O'Connor, 486; Robin Scroggs, 'Paul and the Eschatological Woman', *JAR* 40 (1972), 297.

14. See C. Seltman, *Women in Antiquity* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1956); J. Leipoldt, *Die Frau in der Antiken Welt und im Urchristentum* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1962); and A. Oepke, *gynē*, *TDNT*, I, 777-84.

15. See BAG, 277; W. Foerster, *exousia*, *TDNT*, II, 562-75; A. Feuillet, 'Le signe de puissance sur la tête de la femme. 1 Co 11,10', *NRT* 95 (1973), 945-54.

16. Lowrie, '1 Corinthians XI', 122; Adinolfi, 'Il velo', 173; and see further examples at Mt. 9.6; Lk. 9.1; Jn 17.2; Rev. 11.6; 14.18; 22.14.

17. This meaning for v. 10 was first advocated by J.B. Lightfoot, in his *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae* (Oxford: Univ. Press, 1859), IV, 238.

18. See Josef Kürzinger, 'Frau und Mann nach 1 Kor. 11,11f', *BZ* 22 (1978), 270-75.

19. *Ibid.* See, e.g., Gen. 26.1 LXX.

20. Cf. W.F. Orr and J.A. Walther, *1 Corinthians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 261, who think it interrupts the flow of the argument.

21. BDF, sec. 449(2).

22. See n. 14 above, and J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 356-76.

23. Adinolfi, 'Il velo'; Murphy-O'Connor, 'Sex and Logic'; Scroggs, 'Paul'; Hurley, 'Did Paul Require'; and many commentaries, e.g., F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971), 103-106.

24. For example, Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 182-89 (Jewish); and Murphy-O'Connor, 486; Scroggs, 297 (homosexuality).

25. For example, J.A. Fitzmyer, 'A Feature of Qumran Angelology and the Angels of 1 Cor. XI.10', *NTS* 4 (1957-58), 48-58; Morna D. Hooker, 'Authority on her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor. XI.10', *NTS* 10 (1963-64), 410-16; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 105f.

26. On women veiling in the ancient Near East, see A. Oepke, *kalyptō*, *TDNT*, III, 556-558; R. de Vaux, 'Sur le voile des femmes dans l'Orient ancien', *RB* 44 (1935), 397-412.

27. G.W. Trompf, 'On Attitudes toward Women in Paul and Paulinist Literature: 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and its Context', *CBQ* 42 (1980), 202.

28. McKenzie, 'Hair', 333; Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry*, 161-64.

29. See F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 349, on Acts 18.18.

30. W.O. Walker, '1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Paul's Views Regarding Women', *JBL* 94 (1975), 94-110.

31. Trompf, 'Attitudes', 196-215.

32. L. Cope, '1 Corinthians 11:2-16: One Step Farther', *JBL* 97 (1978), 436.

33. The suggestion made by a few scholars, of editorial re-arrangement of the letter, has not been generally accepted. See W.G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 203-205; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1970), 439-41.

34. Conzelmann, 1f.

35. Annie Jaubert, 'Le voile des femmes (I Cor. XI.2-16)', *NTS* 18 (1971-72), 419-30.
36. Colin Brown, 'Head', *NIDNTT*, II, 159-63.
37. See Conzelmann, 8f., and 1 Cor. 1.2-10, 30; 2.16; 6.9-11; 8.11.
38. J.C. Hurd, *The Origin of I Corinthians* (New York: Seabury, 1965), 90f., cites several commentaries in support of this.
39. As noted by C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper, 1968), 253.
40. See Heb. 9.23; Gal. 4.8, 9.
41. See F. Büchsel, *paradidōmi*, *TDNT*, II, 169-79.
42. See T.Y. Mullins, 'Disclosure: A Literary Form in the New Testament', *NovT* 7 (1964), 44-50.
43. See S. Bedale, 'The Meaning of *kephalē* in the Pauline Epistles', *JTS*, n.s., 5 (1954), 211-15; H. Schlier, *kephalē*, *TDNT*, III 673-82, especially 679.
44. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 62.
45. *1 Corinthians*, 140, and also see 142.
46. Cf. Conzelmann, 186; G. Kittel, *doxa*, *TDNT*, II, 237.
47. See Murphy-O'Connor, 495; Adinolfi, 154f., 169-71; A. Feuillet, 'La Dignité et le rôle de la femme d'après quelques textes pauliniens', *NTS* 21 (1974-75), 159-62; and his 'L'Homme "glorie de Dieu" et la femme "glorie de l'Homme"', *RB* 81 (1974), 161-82.
48. For egalitarian readings of Gen. 2, see Francine Dumas, *Man and Woman* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1966), 36-38; Russel Prohl, *Women in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 36-40; Letha Scazoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1974), 25-27; Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 89-94.
49. See the studies cited in n. 48 above, and R. Laird Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, II, 660f.
50. Lowrie, 'I Corinthians XI', 124.
51. For example, just in *NTS* alone: Fitzmyer, 'Qumran Angelology'; Hooker, 'Authority'; Jaubert, 'Le voile'; Feuillet, 'Le Signe'.
52. Lightfoot, *Horae*, IV, 238.
53. Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 261, note its oddity here.
54. For example, Conzelmann, 181, and Murphy-O'Connor, 498f., both citing LSJ, s.v. *anti*, sec. A III 2.
55. BDF, sec. 208; F. Büchsel, *anti*, *TDNT*, I, 372f.
56. BAG, 72f.



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